

' SHORT TIME TO STAY '
Comments on Time, Literature
and Oral Performance

by

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HANS WOLFF
1920-1967

Hans Wolff was born on April 6, 1920 in Mainz, Germany. In 1934 his family went to Spain where he remained until 1937 when he immigrated to the United States. He attended Queens College, New York, from 1939-1941 and then transferred to Indiana University. From 1942-1946 he served with the Military Intelligence Corps. After the war he returned to Indiana and in 1946 obtained the B.A. magna cum laude in Linguistics and in 1949 a double doctorate in Anthropology and Linguistics (one of the first to be given by that department). In 1949 he was appointed to the faculty of the University of Puerto Rico where he taught for eleven years. His early work was in Amerindian languages, especially in Siouan studies, and in the teaching of English as a second language. While still at the University of Puerto Rico, he was invited in 1953 to visit Nigeria as a UNESCO expert on orthographies. He spent a year in Nigeria, and from that time his interest in Africa and African languages grew. He published widely on the languages and language problems of Nigeria and at the time of his death was one of the leading authorities on Yoruba. In 1960 he accepted an appointment at Michigan State University in the African Studies Center where he taught for three years. While at Michigan State he helped to found and to edit the Journal of African Languages. He also assisted in the early development of the West African Language Conference and for several years served as Chairman of the African Linguistics Committee of the African Studies Association. At the time of his death in September 1967, he was Professor of Linguistics at Northwestern University.

To Daffodils

Fair daffodils, we weep to see
 You haste away so soon;
As yet the early-rising sun
 Has not attain'd his noon.
 Stay, stay
 Until the hasting day
 Has run
 But to the evensong;
And, having pray'd together, we
 Will go with you along.

We have short time to stay, as you,
 We have as short a spring;
As quick a growth to meet decay,
 As you, or anything.
 We die
 As your hours do, and dry
 Away
 Like to the summer's rain;
Or as the pearls of morning's dew,
 Ne'er to be found again.

a poem by

ROBERT HERRICK
1591-1674

SHORT TIME TO STAY
Comments on Time, Literature and Oral Performance

Let me say at the outset how honored I am to contribute to this series of Hans Wolff Memorial Lectures. Although, unlike some of my distinguished predecessors, I did not have the good fortune to meet Hans Wolff personally, I have found his writings a source of intellectual inspiration, above all in his blend of an interdisciplinary and wide-ranging, yet at the same time down-to-earth, approach to his material. His dual qualification in both linguistics and anthropology are of special relevance, well exemplified in his work relating to the general topics to which I want to address myself tonight: his interest not just in texts or technical linguistic description, but also in the social and temporal setting for people's linguistic and literary activities.

I hope I am thus following the general spirit of Hans Wolff's work in taking a twofold path in my lecture tonight, relating my subject both to wider anthropological studies (especially those concerning time) and to the study of oral literature. Although I cannot follow Hans Wolff in his mastery of Yoruba, many of the examples in my discussion will not be too far away, for I will be drawing on West African material to exemplify my general points (including my own fieldwork in Sierra Leone) as well as setting the discussion in the general context of African oral literature.

The term 'oral literature' has become a common one for the study of unwritten forms in African and other cultures which can be seen as, at the least, analogous to the written forms recognized as 'literature' in the traditional categories of Western civilization (e.g. - to give just a very few instances - the Chadwicks' classic work (1939-40), Jacobs, 1959, the series of volumes in 'The Oxford Library of African Literature' (Clarendon Press, 1964-), Tedlock in Paredes and Bauman 1972, Bauman 1977, Sherzer 1977, Finnegan 1970, 1977, and the influential journal Research in African Literatures 1970-). Despite some continuing arguments about the best term to use in particular pieces of research (some scholars, as you know, prefer 'folklore', 'folk literature') and some etymological blockages felt by purists, the idea of regarding

such forms as in some sense 'literature' is well enough established for it not to need an apologia here -- at any rate, I am not intending to give one. I will merely assert as a given background to my analysis that there is now a recognized area of study in which African oral literature is treated as one form of literature, in principle comparable to written literature in its general form, its literary quality, its various genres and, to some extent at least, in the kind of analysis to which it can be subjected.

The stress in such study is most often on the literature in 'oral literature'. There has been a huge research endeavor extending over many years (for this is by no means just a recent phenomenon) devoted to the collection and analysis of texts as the abiding form in which this literature is expressed and through which it can receive wider circulation. This stress on the literature side of the equation is indeed a valid and illuminating one and one which I myself would continue to advocate as one way of extending our cultural horizons and deepening our understanding of the riches of human artistry and imagination. However tonight I want to focus attention on the other side, and consider some of the implications of the oral nature of 'oral literature'. This has, of course, many aspects which I cannot follow up here. The point about it that I want to highlight tonight is the characteristic of oral literature that, being oral, its existence depends on its actual oral performance, i.e., on a specific occasion or occasions rather than on a permanent written text; and that the occasion of the performance is necessarily an event in time. As such it takes up time and it needs the co-ordination of activities of a number of people within time; as Howard Becker put it in a seminal discussion, 'the artist...works in the center of a large network of co-operating people all of whose work is essential to the final outcome' (Becker 1974, p. 769).

This need for co-ordination sounds a simple point, scarcely worth the stating. But a serious consideration of this point also represents something of a contrast to the way literature (even oral literature) is often looked at and presented. When we think of 'literature' we commonly, I think, picture this in terms, basically, of a 'text' -- something which exists in space rather than in time. Indeed

in some ways the picture is often of something timeless, with some kind of permanent existence in its own right above and apart from the immediate pressure of the moment, something which can enshrine an abiding truth which may transcend the detailed occasions of everyday and convey its message and its beauty among differing groups and backgrounds and historical eras.

This set of associations is a powerful one even in the study of oral literature. Of course serious students accept that with oral literature one ought to include some attention to the occasion, the audience, the skills and circumstances of performance and so on, as well as just to the text. But even so the picture of 'literature' still predominates (and not just among structuralists) as something permanent and timeless which can be abstracted for study as a 'text' - something abiding which one does not expect to 'haste away so soon'

Is this misleading with oral literature? Recent work by some leading American anthropologists and folklorists (such as Dell Hymes, Robert Georges, Dan Ben-Amos, Roger Abrahams, Richard Bauman and Dennis Tedlock) has highlighted the way in which the performance of oral literature can be seen as an event in time as well as - indeed rather than - existing in a spatial dimension as a text. They speak of the performance as a 'story-telling event' or a 'communicative event'. I want to adopt a similar outlook here, also linking this with more general anthropological questions about the organization of time and the timed co-ordination of people's activities.

For the background to this approach to African oral literature as an event in time I am also drawing on anthropological and sociological studies of time and time-reckoning. This is a rich field of study, especially in social anthropology where a general contrast is often made between the primarily clock-bound and mechanical system characteristic of Western industrial and urban culture and the possibly more open time order of non-industrial and oral cultures. Basic

to the approach is the idea of the cultural relativity of time. 'Time' is not after all something objective and external, as might be assumed from the viewpoint of recent Western experience, but can be differently ordered and conceived in different cultures - an idea formulated by Durkheim in the conclusion of his influential Elementary forms of the religious life (first published in 1919; see especially pp. 488ff. and 22-3 in 1961 edition) and developed in many detailed studies since. Martin Nilsson's classic Primitive time reckoning, published in 1920, used what was then known as the 'comparative method' to trace the general development from 'chaos' to 'order' in time-reckoning systems: from the discontinuous 'time indications' of the more primitive people to the rational and systematic 'time reckoning' of Western civilization. His framework was somewhat evaluative and evolutionist, it is true, but still drew attention in a detailed and well-documented way to the existence of different systems of time-reckoning in illustration of the cultural differences in time divisions and usages. There have been many anthropological studies since, mostly based on detailed field research (e.g., among others, Hallowell 1937 on Ojibwa, Evans-Pritchard 1939 on Nuer, Bohannan 1953 on Tiv, Beidelman 1963 on Kaguru, Pocock 1964 on Patidar, Geertz 1966 on Bali, Panoff 1969 on Maenge, Ohnuki-Tierney 1973 on Ainu, Bourdieu 1977 on Kabyle peasants), as well as comparative comment from an anthropological viewpoint (e.g. Goody 1968, 1977 pp. 45 ff, Douglas 1973 Part 3, Lévi-Strauss 1962 ch. 8, Barnes 1971, Jackson 1968, Bloch 1977, or, of a more generalized kind, Hallpike 1979 and Zaslavsky 1973) and studies which relate to the characteristics of time-reckoning in western cultures (e.g., Moore 1963, Cipolla 1967, Halbwachs 1947, Gurvitch 1958) or differences within them, as in E.T. Hall's light-hearted but perceptive account of the differences between North American and Latin American or between North European and Arab time systems (Hall, 1955, 1959, etc.).

The general theme which runs through such studies is the social and cultural dimension: time is not something abstract and culture-independent, but created through social interactions and in coordination with human activities. Just as for the Nuer it is not time to break camp and return to the villages because it is month of dwat (one of the 12 months into which they can divide their year) but "one is so

returning and it must, therefore, be dwat" (Evans-Pritchard 1939 p. 201). So the organization of time turns on culturally-chosen rules and actions and on the coordination of human activities rather than on scientifically-set measurement. It is the activity, not the mathematical time segment, that is prior. (I am not intending to enter into questions of the philosophy of time but I suppose this kind of analysis would fit broadly with what Newton-Smith calls the 'reductionist view of time' (1980 pp. 6ff). Edmund Leach sums up this general outlook when he writes in his essay 'Time and false noses', that

We talk of measuring time, as if time were a concrete thing waiting to be measured; but in fact, we create time by creating intervals in social life. Until we have done this there is no time to be measured (1966, p.135).

This comment forms a useful background to the questions I want to raise in relation to oral literature, about how time is organized and created and how activities are co-ordinated in time, especially in societies in which the clock is not a dominant feature of time-reckoning.

I want to make one further point about anthropological studies of the relativity of time ordering before turning more directly to the subject of oral literature. Though many of the original authors themselves were often far from intending this, some of their studies have been taken up as demonstrating a radical divide in attitudes to time between non-industrial (or oral) and industrial (or literate) cultures, a supposed divide which is further sharpened by the still-influential romantic view of 'the primitive'. Thus a truth about cultural relativity has gained credence in the exaggerated form in which two differing cultural types are broadly opposed to each other. In this binary model, vagueness about time divisions in the one type of culture sharply contrasts with the exact and rational time-keeping of the other; little or no division of labor in the former, and hence no need to co-ordinate activities since people are broadly undifferentiated and carry out the same activities as each other, is opposed to the necessity in highly differentiated industrial

and urban contexts to co-ordinate by the clock. Along the same lines, non-industrial societies viewed as essentially rural and close to nature, dominated by the natural rhythms of the year, the seasons, the stars, and the agricultural cycle, and possessing little scope for active and ordered time choices beyond these natural cycles; and this is seen as radically different from the artificial, urban and planned nature of our 'mechanical civilization'. Similarly, when 'development' is discussed, it is often held that "undeveloped" peoples must first be taught the idea of 'saving time', or 'counting time.' The assumption is that in such cultures people merely complete whatever task is in hand and then fall back into a passive acceptance of time just drifting past -- going to sleep for instance rather than 'making the most of time' by choosing to use it for specific activities in a fashion thought more typical of 'developed' nations.

Of course, there is a modicum of fact behind such stereotypes. And there is also perhaps some truth in the claim that the English language unlike some others inevitably draws attention to time whether we want it to or not through its insistence that 'every verb form show a tense', so that, as Quine puts it, 'our ordinary language shows a tiresome bias in its treatment of time' (Quine 1960, p. 170). But the final impression that is sometimes evoked in statements about non-industrial societies is a somewhat romantic and exaggerated one of people following a collectively-imposed system (often based on natural rhythms) rather than making specific choices; fitting in with broad annual cycles but not co-ordinating specific timed commitments beyond the necessary obligations of the agricultural or ecological seasons or, perhaps, the communally celebrated ritual year; following out a passive rather than planned ordering of time. Though certainly not held by all the writers I have cited, this is a common enough implication of much of their work to have become part of 'conventional wisdom', the kind of view which is epitomized (if in extreme form) in Pierre Bourdieu's comments on Kabyle peasants' 'attitude toward time':

Submission to nature is inseparable from submission to the passage of time in the rhythms of nature. The profound feelings of dependence and solidarity toward that

nature whose vagaries and rigours he suffers, together with the rhythms and constraints to which he feels the more subject since his techniques are particularly precarious, foster in the Kabyle peasant an attitude of submission and of non-chalant indifference to the passage of time which no one dreams of mastering, using up, or saving... free from the concern for schedules, and ignoring the tyranny of the clock...'the devil's mill', the peasant works without haste, leaving to tomorrow that which cannot be done today.

(1977, pp. 57,58).

I shall be returning to comment on this view again later.

Against this background I now want to turn to some examples of oral literature in Africa. How are oral performances organized in time? Does this involve planning? How are people's activities coordinated and scheduled in time? Behind such questions we have constantly to remember the oral nature of this literature. Like Herrick's daffodils, oral forms, unlike written texts, have a 'short time to stay'--indeed no time to stay without a socially organized and recognized event in time; for they depend on this actual time event--the performance--for their existence.

Co-ordinating people's activities so that they come together at the same time and broadly for the same purpose is a basic requirement that relates both to the ordering of time in any society and, in particular, to the organization of oral literary performance. For though there are occasional instances of solitary songs, the typical context for the realization of oral literary forms is that people must be present together at one time and place--performer(s), participants, audience. Unlike written literature which can

in a sense 'exist' without anyone gathered together, oral literature depends essentially on coordination of people's activities.

Let me give some examples of the kind of organization that may be involved. One evening in September during my fieldwork among the Limba of northern Sierra Leone in 1961, I observed a crowd of people coming out together in one of the compounds outside the chief's hut in the village where I was then staying. They danced, sang and drummed for several hours, producing songs of the kind that could be recorded and published in textual form as examples of Limba 'oral poetry'.

How was this apparently unpremeditated event set up in time? In practice it formed part of a whole series of events, involving careful preparation over several months, leading up to the boys' initiation ceremonies in the following dry season (the main ceremony taking place around April). This was in one sense set in the framework of a yearly cycle, but it also involved specific decisions and planning, for this initiation did not take place every year and its actual enactment depended on several factors and coordinated activities by a large number of people. The boys themselves had to have been working hard all year (and the previous season too) to ensure a plentiful harvest for the rice needed for the ceremonies, for otherwise these could not take place. Each also had to formally petition his father according to the due forms to allow him to enter the ceremony, and in turn each father had to visit the chief to make a formal request for his son, guaranteeing that there would indeed be enough rice for the occasion and accompanying his visit with the expected gifts and appropriate formal oratory. Note the time element already involved --time had to be found (and coordinated with others) for the visits, for organizing the gifts, for arranging through many months' labor that the due harvest would be forthcoming. This initial sequence of events was followed up by the boys themselves undertaking certain formal visits as a group -- once again coordinating their activities and preparations for this, and arranging the time in advance to ensure they were all free at the same time. One of their visits was to the local chief, bringing gifts of palm wine and huge loads of heavy firewood (procuring both of which again takes time) as well as making

formal speeches. It was on that occasion that the evening of special dancing and singing that I witnessed took place. This was a fairly expected phase in the sequence of events leading up to the later initiation, but it did not invariably take place in any given village and in itself depended on a series of further actions by a number of people. The group of boys not only had to bring the due gifts and speeches but also, if they wanted to dance, had to clear that intention with the local chiefs, with the elders and with the recently initiated youths. In each case this involved a lengthy interchange on the lines of 'we want to dance...', with formal speaking by both sides. The women too had to be formally requested and agree beforehand to act as the chorus, essential for responding to the lead singer. So too with the lead singers and the expert drummers. In the case I saw, these all happened to be local, but on similar occasions when a suitable expert is not available or free to perform locally, such experts are sought from other villages and have to make their way through the bush paths to be ready at the due time. In either case, their participation has to be ensured beforehand with due interchange of gifts and words, followed afterwards by gifts (sometimes in the form of money) and appropriately worded thanks. One of the local experts who performed that evening told me that he had in fact spent time earlier in the year making himself a new drum in anticipation, for at this season an expert with a wide reputation could make a reasonable amount of money in Limba terms, by travelling around in answer to invitations to such dances.

This single event then which in textual terms could be abstracted into just a few pages of poetry, in practice involved the coordination of a large number of people - not just on the part of the 80 or so direct participants in the performance, but also the activities of all those whose authority was sought or whose activities, often over the months, were necessary for providing rice, palm wine, or the standard token gift of kola nuts. Detailed organizing and planning involving quite complex coordination of a whole series of activities and decisions lay behind what on the surface might have looked like a simple and even spontaneous event taking place in some kind of 'natural' way among a crowd of undifferentiated people. Yet the performance would not have been realized -- the particular form of that genre of sung poetry

would not have come into existence in its particular formulation or been collectable as text at all -- without that specific event in time having been organized by all those people following up a whole series of organized events in time.

The same general pattern applies to the performance of other Limba songs (here again I am drawing on fieldwork in the 1960's and the ethnographic present tense should be understood in that context). In each case, the full realization of the sung poems depends on performance at a specific time and place and behind this is a series of organized activities, sometimes on a greater sometimes on a lesser scale, depending on the genre and the expected social context. The singing and drumming that takes place throughout the whole night preceding the final initiation ceremony in the dry season involves even larger scale coordination and numbers. Hundreds of people come together, many of them travelling miles through the bush with their gifts, and lengthy preparations have to have been made by their local hosts for their entertainment. On a smaller scale are such events as the performance of the special hunting poetry in the ceremony known as madonsia which follows a hunter's killing of a bush cow. A date is fixed for several days later, and after the due preparations have been completed the hunter comes out in the village at night with his followers (who, again, have to organize their time and commitments to be present to support their colleague), watched by spectators and participants from the village who have arranged their time to be ready to take part in the event. The same pattern is detectable even in Limba work songs. This is a form which, on the face of it, might seem essentially 'spontaneous' and unplanned; indeed, it has been taken by some analysts to represent the 'natural' even biological roots from which rhythm and thus poetry perhaps ultimately sprang (see e.g. Jousse 1925, and discussion in Finnegan 1977, pp. 91 ff). But in this case too, there is sometimes an element of prior organization. When the rice has to be hoed into the hillside, working parties are formed beforehand with plans for a particular day -- and part of the planning is to engage the services of an expert lead singer and drummer who will take his position at the front of the row as the hoers progress up up the steep hillside and answer in chorus to the verses set

by the leader. The leader is not usually paid, but he expects a carefully worded invitation in advance, and thanks and perhaps a token gift later. Even so 'simple' a piece of oral literature as a 'work-song' does not just spring up of itself, it has to be organized and made to happen at a specific time by a number of people co-operating together. Different though the contexts and genres may be in detail, all performances of sung poetry among the Limba depend on this general pattern of co-ordinated activities leading up to and making possible the actual realization of the literary event on a specific occasion -- activities to do with organizing the necessary musical instruments and instrumentalists, the preparation of the food and gifts for performers and audience, the presence and participation of both leader(s) and chorus, the interchange of formal speeches and permissions, and the coming together (sometimes after miles of travelling) of a number of people at the same time.

Every example of oral literature is dependent for its performance in time -- i.e., its actualization as a piece of oral literature at all -- on a similar background of coordination and planning. Or, at any rate, this is one way in which such literary events -- whether or not they are 'collected' and abstracted on a page as a 'text' -- can be looked at by the analyst. They can be seen as involving the necessary co-ordination of a number of people who are acting with full deliberation and knowledge in their appropriate roles (i.e. not in an undifferentiated non-thinking mass) with the definite and effective intention of bringing about a specific time event which makes possible both the performance of literature and, through this, the creation of specific time divisions in the same sense as that formulated by Edmund Leach (quoted earlier in the larger context of festivals).

One could add many other examples to the sketchy account I have given of the performing of Limba oral poetry - in fact I suspect that every collector of oral literary forms who has taken any interest in the background to their performance could expand on similar patterns of co-operation. In his account of Iwi Egungun chants among the Yoruba, for instance, Qlajubu (1974) explains how one form in which these are performed is at the yearly festival of the Egungun society -- a large occasion which demands long advance organization,

involving not only the singers (who themselves have in turn undertaken special training and, for some of the chants, exact memorizing) but also the instruments, special costumes, food for the participants, etc. etc. Consistent with the urban setting of Yoruba culture the number of spectators is likely to be numbered in hundreds or thousands, and arrangements are made for the chanting to extend for hours, sometimes the whole night through. Again, the Ozidi saga from the Ijaw people recently published as a lengthy text of several hundred pages (Clark 1977) depended on an event in time which was not undertaken every year, but when it did apparently demanded a series of activities -- procession, sacrifice, a succession of dances, and spectators gathering at the due time (Clark 1977, pp. xxxii ff.). Here too, as Becker (1974) put it, art involves 'collective action'.

An even more elaborate organization lay behind the Bagre myths of the Lodagaa people of Ghana published by Jack Goody (1972). These can be regarded primarily as texts (and they are substantial ones of over 5,000 'lines' each). Take for instance the first 22 lines of the 'White Bagre' myth:

Gods,
ancestors,
guardians,
beings of the wild,
the leather bottles
say we should perform,
because of the scorpion's sting,
because of suicide,
aches in the belly,
pains in the head.
The elder brother
slept badly.
He took out some guinea corn
and hurried along
to the diviner
who poured out his bag
and then said,
let's grasp the stick.
They did so
and he picked up 'deity'
and he picked up 'the wild'

and he picked up 'sacrifice'....,

ngmini/kpime/siuwe/k>nt>me/game/ka b>>r/ dun>non/
kure pīime/ >>r puur/ >>r zuri/ ka t> kpēē/
gana fāān/ ir a kyī/ ir z> kyena/ gobasoba/
k'o zur l>b/ti eyl ka/ k'o ir ba ny>> /ti ba ny>>/
k'o ir weni/ k'o ir wi> / k'o ir b>>r.

(Goody 1972, pp. 121, 316).

One can also look at this, not as a text, but as a performance organized in time -- part of a sequence of activities which (far from being just a spontaneous bubbling up of some deep "mythic consciousness") in fact necessarily involved hard-headed choices and coordination over a period of 6 months or more.

The recitation of the myth is associated with the initiation ceremonies of the Bagre association in the dry season (around December), but also takes place at earlier stages in the ceremonial sequence and depends on a series of activities to make the whole process possible. Since the Bagre initiation only takes place about every four years - and then only if preliminary inquiries reveal that there will be enough grain, fowls, and potential initiates, and that outstanding debts from the previous round have been settled - a decision has to be made beforehand about its feasibility after coordinated discussion among the lineage, both in the locality where the ceremony is planned and in contact with others. The decision must in fact be taken months in advance for the initiates must be told in time to abstain from shea fruit (ripe in May) during the months leading up to the ceremony. In the interval, much time-consuming work has to be completed in preparation: supplies must be organized for the festivities, beer brewed, firewood obtained 'well in advance', preferably in the previous dry season (Goody 1972, pp. 66-7), and shea butter prepared: 'a long and complicated process that takes many days' (p. 70). Arrangements must be made too for the 'Bagre Speakers' to be present. These are experts who have learned the recitations (again, a time-consuming task). Their role is to repeat the Bagre myth at the appropriate point in the ceremony and to teach it to the initiates - a process involving instruction, practice and testing. The myth itself has to be recited at several points, in each case with the requirement that it has to be repeated three times (again,

no light task). Indeed the Lodagaa sometimes get around this by arranging for two people to recite at once as a 'way of saving time' (pp. 58,69). In the most public part of the final ceremony which forms a necessary background to the performance of the myth (even though the actual recitation is not public) people come from settlements all around, traveling as far as 20 miles to be present (p. 105). Once again, the event has to be organized, co-ordinating the movements of a number of people coming together at a set time.

This series of activities over many months is not carried out just for the sake of the recitation of a particular piece of oral literature, but as part of a whole complex of ceremonies of which the recitation of the Bagre myth forms one part. Nevertheless it is striking that the actual realization of what could, from one viewpoint, be abstracted as a piece of text on the printed page, or, in another prevalent (if misleading) model, as a spontaneous and natural expression of mythopoeic imagination, in practice depends for its enactment on a protracted series of carefully planned actions by a range of different people, each with their own part to play.

One common context for the performance and the recording of oral literature is on the occasion of large scale ceremonies not unlike that of the Lodagaa Bagre ceremonies or the boys' initiation among the Limba which take place only once a year or once in several years. Each such performance, together with any text that proceeds from it, depends on a similar coordination of effort and interest among a number of people, often over a long period, so that at the right time - 'on the night' - the performance can indeed materialize. This is so even when the exact timing (in an objective sense) of the start is not known in advance. Consider for instance the way the Fulani-Hausa oral court singers' contributions on the magnificent occasions of leading Muslim festivals depend on the coordination of a complex sequence of activities: the announcement by the emir of the sighting of the new moon by some specifically authorized person (one of his representatives or a learned malam), the communication of this announcement to those already preparing for the start of the performance, and the minstrels, already waiting in readiness, immediately starting on their performance (Abdulkadir 1975, p. 133). It seems immediate and carefree perhaps, but once again this

depends on the careful organization of the activities of a number of people: again 'art as collective action'.

The importance of organizing a performance through coordinating the activities of a number of people to a single point in time is not just a feature of large-scale annual ceremonies. It also applies to the literary performances of more select groups. In the Akan communities in West Africa, for instance, there is a strong tradition of people joining in special 'companies' such as military and hunting associations. Members of these companies come together for special meetings at which the celebrated Akan drum poems, among others, are performed.

Is the chief greater than the hunter?

Arrogance! Hunter? Arrogance!

That pair of beautiful things on your feet,

The sandals that you wear,

How did it all happen?

It is the hunter that killed the duyker:

The sandals are made of the hide of the duyker.

Does the chief say he is greater than the hunter?

Arrogance! Hunter? Arrogance!

The noisy train that leads you away,

The drums that precede you,

The hunter killed the elephant,

The drum head is the ear of the elephant.

Does the chief say he is greater than the hunter?

Arrogance! Hunter? Arrogance!

(Nketia 1963, p. 76).

The organization of such meetings and performances is not left to chance. There are a series of named officers and specialists with responsibilities for arranging such events, among them the master drummer, other expert drummers of various kinds, lead singers, and chorus. Besides regular meetings, members of the company are called together (with all the arranging this entails) for special occasions like the funeral of one of their members or notable success in the hunt. Nketia describes the complex organizing that is necessary:

A few weeks prior to the celebration which always takes place on a Thursday, 'the natal day' of the

elephant, the hunter (who must have previously sent presents of meat to both the head hunter and the chief of the town) now comes in person or sends a messenger with some drinks to the head hunter and informs him of his intention to celebrate his recent successes. The head hunter then accompanies the messenger to the chief and he and his elders are informed. The news is then passed on to all master hunters in the district, most of whom like to be present on such occasions to 'help' their fellow hunter, but more so to enjoy the fun of the celebration. Drummers and singers are invited.

When the day fixed for celebration approaches, the song dialogues already described are performed anew. The hunter with his attendants (boys in training) announces himself at the outskirts of town by firing a gun. He bursts into song:

Amoafo, offspring of the father of mother Amoafo,
Amoafo, brother of Kwabena Ampadu,
Amoafo, run and meet me with open arms,
For I have killed a powerful game.
Amoafo, Amoafo,
Please run and meet me.

He is met by a gang of people. There are exchanges of songs: recitations of praises, declamations, congratulations, etc. as before. He is carried shoulder high through the town, to a background of much singing, to the place of celebration where the chief and elders, master hunters, men, women and children are gathered. He goes round shaking hands while drummers and singers call to him with his own strong names and praise appellations....

The hunter is of course very busy, joining in the singing, alluding to his experiences in the lead to the chorus refrains, and dancing with a gun in his hand, making symbolic gestures, impersonating animals, and so on....

Even for this relatively specialist group note the amount of organizing or communication that was necessary to set up the event beforehand, and the number of people in different roles who had to interact on the day itself.

Even a performance which seems much more a spur-of-the-moment occurrence depends on a series of coordinated activities and prior organization. Take the Yoruba farà chants studied by Hans Wolff (among others). He describes these chants as performed during a festive gathering in the houses of some wealthy or influential notable; "at any time during the course of the party the singer may begin chanting. There is no theoretical length limit to a chant, and the same farà may be repeated, with variations, a good many times. When several performers are present, they often alternate in performing so that there may be chanting for the full duration of the festivities" (Wolff 1962, p. 50). But in fact, as Wolff further makes clear, specific events in time had to take place to make this apparently informal series of performances possible at all, and the singers had to be either specially invited or hear of the event through their communication network (sometimes within the same compound) so as to ensure being present. Furthermore, they must make sure that they have acquired beforehand the necessary knowledge of the history of the family they are visiting, including a large number of the names of family members, both dead and alive (Wolff 1962, p. 49), detailed information which takes time to acquire. Furthermore, such singers are experts who have had to learn their craft either through apprenticeship (for men) or by frequent practice and experiment (for women) over many years (Babalola 1973, p. 80). Top singers also try to arrange a drum accompaniment (yet more coordination needed for this) and in return the hosts must organize gifts of food, drinks and on occasion money (Babalola 1973, p. 81; Wolff 1962, p. 49). Once again a number of events in time must come together in a planned way for the farà texts recorded by Hans Wolff and others to be realized as an event in time, that is (for oral literature), to come into existence at all in any real sense.

Other literary events are in a sense initiated by individuals rather than dependent on a specific celebration. A Yoruba client goes to consult an Ifa diviner, thus setting

in train the recitation of one of the sets of the immense corpus of Ifa literature (see e.g. Bascom 1969; Abimbola 1976, 1977). A free lance itinerant singer among the Hausa or Fulani starts off a praise song in some public place, compelling his sometimes reluctant patron to hear and reward him (Smith 1967, Abdulkadir 1975). Again contemporary Mandinka singers themselves take the initiative in starting off performance sessions, sometimes indeed as a crafty prelude to draw the crowds and set up an occasion for political speeches by one of their patrons (Innes 1974, pp. 136-7). But here too, what might seem like an isolated act by a single individual also depends on a whole series of earlier events in time - especially the training and career of the expert singer himself, something often developed over many years and on innumerable occasions, each involving the same kind of co-ordination of mutual expectations or activities of others. It is not just anyone who can initiate an oral literary event or at any time--it must be someone with the appropriate background, the conventions about the right time and situation must be observed, the other people inevitably involved must broadly act within their accepted roles. It is not a case of a spontaneous or unplanned outburst to or from an undifferentiated public or outside the accepted temporal conventions.

Prior planning of a more direct kind also sometimes takes place even with relatively individual or small-scale performances. This brings up the somewhat controversial question of the extent and existence of prior composition in oral performances as against the view of some of the 'oral-formulaic' school (following the work of Parry and Lord) that composition-in-performance is the normal, possibly invariable, characteristic of oral literature. I do not intend to elaborate on this controversy here (having discussed it in a number of other places already, e.g. Finnegan 1977, chap. 3) except to comment that there do indeed seem to be some instances in African oral literature (as elsewhere) where composition divorced from, and prior to, the actual performance does appear to occur. In each case, this adds yet another temporal element to the preparation and coordination necessary for the realization of that particular piece of literature. To comment on just one example: some of the Dinka oral poems collected and published by Francis Deng (Deng 1973) are far from being

composed on the spot. A Dinka who needs a song for a particular purpose goes to an expert in composition to ask for a song. The expert composes it for him and those who are present are charged with the task of memorizing it for the individual client who then possesses it as his own song and can sing it on a later (probably already planned) occasion. Indeed even the composition itself may involve some considerable expenditure of time, for it can sometimes only be completed after a special investigation into the history of the family concerned (Deng 1973, pp. 78,85). Other recorded cases of prior composition - often extending over a lengthy period - can be found in studies of the Ila and Tonga of Central Africa, the Chopi of Mozambique (see e.g. Finnegan 1970, pp. 268 ff), the Bedouin (Meeker 1979, pp. 112 ff), and perhaps most interesting and best documented of all, the Somali (see e.g. Johnson 1974, pp. 12 ff, Andrzejewski and Lewis 1964, pp. 45 ff). These too - and I suspect that many other similar cases could be found - add yet another factor in the expenditure and planning of time that, however unmeasured by the clock, is a necessary condition for the realization of oral art as a specific event in time.

So far I have been speaking about oral poetry, which in general terms tends to be more highly regarded, specialist and hence, one would expect, more elaborately planned than the oral forms often classified as prose, in particular than stories. This latter is a form of African oral literature which, as you know, has been extensively documented at least in the sense of the publication of hundreds of volumes of texts of African narratives of one kind or another (some indication of the huge number of such collections can be seen in Scheub's recent bibliography, 1977). Do the unassuming tales also involve the kind of time budgeting and coordination of activities that emerged as a common pattern behind the performance of oral poems? It could well be assumed that, apart from the fact (significant enough in itself) that the original realization of the published texts must have been in an actual event in time, organization and coordination are not really necessary to any real extent.

Let me take the example of stories among the Limba. Here certainly, story-telling is on the relatively spontaneous end

of the spectrum, in contrast to the more formalized ceremonies for which the date is fixed beforehand. Yet, even in this case where rather than deciding beforehand to have a 'story-telling session' people often just slide into exchanging stories, often stimulated by young boys asking each other riddles, there are still temporal conventions that must be observed. There is the underlying requirement for many people's activities to be coordinated so that it becomes possible for people to be gathered together at the same time, otherwise story-telling would not be feasible, for it does not just 'happen' of itself.

Limba stories are not normally told during the day. This is not an absolute prohibition (it is in fact sometimes contravened, especially by children spending long hours in the fields chasing birds from the growing rice), but it is a generally observed convention among adults. The evening is thus the accepted time for stories - and this means that people must have come home to the village from working on their farms, which are often some miles from the village, and also be in the relaxed mood appropriate for enjoying story-telling. This in turn means that they must have had their main meal of the day (normally in the early evening) and this in its turn depends on a whole series of actions by a number of people: cooking, eating with the due forms (the father being served first and so on), clearing away; and behind this yet again lies all the organization necessary for acquiring the food and the means for cooking and preparing it: getting the firewood, the rice, the leaves for 'the sauce', pounding the rice, fetching the water (a time-consuming task for the women and children), making the fire, boiling the water, cooking the rice and sauce. Furthermore people are not really relaxed without a supply of palm wine in circulation and that depends on the daily evening visit of individual owners to their palm trees outside the village for the gourd they have left hanging to collect the wine during the day. These activities have to be coordinated and completed before there is even an opportunity for the telling of stories.

As well as all this, people have to be present in sufficient numbers to make telling and hearing stories a rewarding experience. Preferably this involves not just a narrator

but someone to formally 'answer' him, and a circle of participants/audience who not only react to the narration but also join in the chorus of the songs, perhaps 20-30 people. Such groups often gather on the veranda of one of the houses in the village (the largest group is usually at the chief's house, but this is not the only place), so someone who wants to take part must discover where his companions are and where stories are going on (if they are) if he wants to join them. Despite the public nature of many Limba activities, their villages are not so small that any one person automatically sees or hears everything that is going on or that all events are essentially 'communal' ones.

A further requirement is that there is nothing else taking up people's time on that particular evening. This may seem an obvious point, but it can be forgotten that in non-industrial societies too, time is not unlimited (sometimes we assume too readily that we are the only people who are ever short of time!). There are a number of other events that could be going on which would make a story-telling session impossible or inappropriate - a law case on the chief's veranda, involving the leading elders as well as a large group of onlookers, a formal welcome or interchange of greetings for a visitor, a village ceremony, a dance of some kind. Or even without such other definite commitments, individuals may well have other activities which on that particular evening they prefer to pursue. They could for example be gossiping with friends, arranging to consult a diviner, playing with their children, weaving, basket-making, preparing their tools for the farm or smithy, dancing, hunting in the bush (the expert pursuit of certain gifted individuals), doing leather-work, sewing, spinning, hair-dressing, playing a musical instrument, making bead aprons, or, a common recreation among the Limba as elsewhere, sleeping. All these counter-attractions too have their time conventions, of course, and some are more open to individuals in some circumstances (e.g. the possession or otherwise of a lamp) than in others. But these are all possible other commitments or counter-attractions and ones which are an alternative way of spending time to that of telling stories. Just because the Limba, as in many other non-industrial cultures, have relatively low division of labor in the sense of full-time work, this does not mean that individuals all spend their time in exactly the same occupation or

that they therefore have no option about the various tasks or skills on which at any given time they choose to spend their time.

Limba story-telling sessions therefore, though relatively spontaneous, in one sense rest on a basis of implicit organization and (to some extent at least) explicit choice. They do not just bubble up naturally but, even in this case, depend on a whole series of coordinated actions and decisions. I must confess I did not find it difficult to collect texts of Limba stories - small groups of people were almost always prepared to find it worth their while to record narratives for me - but looking back and bearing in mind the complexity underlying people meeting at the same time for this specific purpose, I now find it not surprising that 'story-telling sessions' were not in fact regularly organized or extremely frequent events.

A similar pattern involving coordination and choice can be found more widely in story-telling situations in Africa. Often this does not emerge clearly in publications which concentrate primarily on texts, but it is sometimes explicitly described or can be detected implicitly in the background given by the collector. Wala story-telling sessions in Ghana, for instance, take place when people have returned from their farms in the evening and after they have 'had dinner' with all that that implies (Fikry-Atallah, 1972, p. 398). Similarly Bini family story-telling takes place in the early evening after the completion of work (including women's work, for the wives too are present, Ben Amos 1975, p. 24). Among the Haya of Tanzania, stories are told within the household while the evening meal is actually cooking (Seitel 1980, p. 26), while Xhosa story-telling is 'essentially a private matter' carried out among people who know each other well so as to ensure greater rapport (Scheub 1975, p. 12) - a situation involving less need for contact among a wider group but still demanding coordination of individuals with differing commitments and roles.

Time constraints about when stories must not be told are also a common feature of African (and other) story-telling. Among the sanctions which are said to uphold the common prohibitions against telling stories in the day time are such

penalties for infringement as going bald, the livestock disappearing, general disaster, horns growing on the narrator's or listener's head, or not being able to find your maternal uncle just when you have dire need of him (see e.g. Evans-Pritchard 1967, p. 18, Gecau 1970, Hunter 1961, p. 534, Finnegan 1970, p. 373, Scheub 1975, pp. 9-11, Evans-Pritchard et al 1960-61; also general discussion in Ben Amos in Lindfors 1977, pp. 27-8).

I have always assumed that such prohibitions were not taken literally by people and therefore not considered by them very seriously. Certainly, they are broken at times. However the idea of such prohibitions has its own significance -- an indication of the local awareness of the temporal patterning which lies behind this form of oral art. This time convention is one way of marking off such performances as special ones -- different from the communications of everyday living and appropriate for leisure rather than work. Such separation is perhaps of particular moment in oral literature as distinct from written forms. In the latter, in a sense the physical mark of publication in a particular form on the written/printed page is for us part of the definition of literature; once that primary differentiation as 'literature' is made it matters little when we actually read it. With oral art such differentiation is partly achieved through the temporal conventions about the appropriate time for the performance. Such prohibitions too are sometimes linked with an explicit recognition of the time element involved, in the sense that story-telling both takes up time (time which during the daytime should be spent on other activities) and is dependent on coordinating the activities of a number of people to ensure that they will be at leisure at the same time, free for story-telling.

Most accounts of African narratives emphasize the content of the stories and say little about the temporal context. Indeed it is tempting - I am as guilty here as anyone - to feel that having recorded the text one has then 'got it': the specimen has then been collected and can be taken away for further analysis. But in view of the organization of time and coordination of activities involved, asking about details of this aspect might be equally interesting to follow up. I confess I am not really very clear how long Limba individuals

spent on story-telling when I wasn't there, how they chose that rather than something else, what compromises they had to make to coordinate such sessions. And I suspect other researchers too may have rather a gap on this kind of information. Possibly because of this gap in our evidence, together with the still prevailing romantic view of 'natural' and untrammelled rural life, the impression has somehow become prevalent that the African countryside is every evening filled with story-telling peasants gathered under palm trees and pouring out tales about the exploits of the tortoise or the ancestors in night-long sessions. This may sometimes happen - but it can't just be assumed on the evidence of the story collections. There are still questions to be asked about when and how and how often such time events take place - how they are organized and coordinated, how much planning is involved, how people choose when (and when not) to tell stories. Story telling - and hence stories - does not just 'happen' but depends on the active and cooperative behavior of a number of people.

One specific set of questions relates to just how much time measured in objective terms is taken up by the performance of oral literary forms. A simple-sounding question - but often enough we do not know the answer. African tales are often quite short (those in the published collections at any rate) though the session in which they are told can be lengthy. Limba story-telling sessions could extend to 3-4 hours, even though most stories take only a few minutes (1/2 hour at most among those I recorded) and a similar pattern seems evident in other cultures too (e.g. Wala in Fikry-Atallah 1972, p. 398). Other stories take longer. Ben-Amos (1975, pp. 22, 51) speaks of certain forms of Edo story-telling sessions in Benin sometimes going on all night 'till daybreak', in some cases consisting of just one story. He also encountered one narrator who told narratives taking 12 and 18 hours in two sessions and others who told the same stories taking 2-3 hours (Ben-Amos 1975 p. 51). In Sierra Leone Cosentino attended a three-night stand by a leading Mende story-teller in which he told what was essentially one story (including certain digressions) to an audience of 600 people (Cosentino 1980). Among the Kalabari in the Rivers area of Nigeria, the pattern is different again - the same story is carried on night after night, often stopping at an exciting point

to prepare for the next night's session (Robin Horton, personal communication).

Many of the big annual events which include oral performances not surprisingly often extend over many hours - commonly all night, often attended by crowds of people (e.g. chants at Iwi Egungun festivals, Qlajubu 1974, p. 36 or songs at Limba initiation ceremonies), though in such cases the oral poetry may in a sense be broken up into a number of shorter pieces. Sustained poetic performance of what could arguably be regarded as 'one' piece by a recognized expert with specialized training can also be quite lengthy, though perhaps not often extending quite as long as a whole night. The panegyrics characteristic of a number of Southern Bantu cultures sometimes run to some hundreds of lines, but at least in the case of the Xhosa as documented by Opland, the actual performances last only a few minutes - the longest Xhosa oral poem which he heard lasted 1/2 hour (Opland 1980b pp. 6, 31). Some West African poetic narratives by contrast often take longer - e.g. the Malian Sun-jata narratives analyzed by John Johnson (Johnson 1978, Vol. 2, p. 21; vol. 3, p.19) took 2 and 4 hours each in performance, the Mande hunters' song 'Kambili' was presented in four performances lasting for over 5 hours in all (Bird 1972, p. 280), Bambara performances lasted for 2 and 3 hours (Kesteloot and Dumestre 1975, p. 22, Dumestre 1974 - the longest text actually published in Dumestre 1974, however, took just under 1 hour, p. 66), while the Fulani recitations recorded by Seydou apparently took a little under 3/4 hour (judging by the records in Seydou, 1972). At the other extreme, Fang sessions can apparently last for 10 hours, 24 hours or all night (Pepper and Wolf 1972, p. 7, Ndoutoume 1970, p. 18, Belinga 1977, p. 11 - though it is not clear how far these involve just one narration), and the Ijaw 'Ozidi Saga' was recorded in 'an actual performance...told and acted in seven nights to dance, music, mime and ritual' (Clark 1977, p. ix).

Often, in fact, one is given no indication by the collector of this background in time or even of whether the text was recorded in one session, let alone how 'typical' such a performance was. 'The text is the thing' and so long as that is sufficiently recorded it is tempting to concentrate on it alone. But it is at least clear from such examples

that, though the absolute number of hours involved is not necessarily very large, if we concentrate on the narration itself (i.e. ignoring the time spent on earlier preparation), it still does take up a far from negligible amount of time, normally involving several people (sometimes large numbers). Here too is a point when people's activities are coordinated and when time must be organized and, through the literary event, time divisions created.

It certainly begins to appear that the ordering of time in Africa is not confined to large-scale patterns dominated by seasonal and annual cycles, accepted (rather than controlled by a basically passive and undifferentiated peasantry. Rather there are a number of specific events - some dependent on lengthy planning, others relatively spontaneous but still dependent on short-term temporal coordination -- which have to be actively organized and brought to realization at some specific time. Each of these events makes a recognized point in time. In African cultures, as in ours, time is not really 'seamless' but divided up - in a sense created -- by the events defined through social activities and in the social interaction of participants: one significant case among them being the collective and coordinated actions lying behind the enactment of literary performance.

The research on time budgets that has become accepted as one aspect of the study of our own social life (for example, in the sociology of leisure) may sometimes be rather a blunt instrument, but further study on these lines would provide relevant information about the temporal patterning of (among other things) the actual performances of African oral literature. This, I would suggest, is a general area of research which could lead us to much greater understanding both of oral literature - including its creation and circulation -- and of the detailed structuring of time in African societies.

So far I have been speaking mainly of the external ordering of the time events which constitute the oral literary performances that become abstracted and published as 'African literary texts'. But I now want to shift the focus to consider more briefly some of the implications of considering

the time element for the analysis of 'internal' characteristics of some African literary forms.

I have already touched obliquely on this in speaking of the temporal characteristics which help to define certain narrations as 'stories' - they must be actually told at one time (the evening) not at another time (the day time). This kind of differentiation both between ordinary and special (artistic) events and between different genres, not infrequently turns (at least in part) on the time of performance, or the time sequence of events leading up to, or presented in the course of, the performance. Thus, there are many parallels to the Limba practice of introducing a story with a series of formulae -- one way of setting the following narration in inverted commas, as it were, the equivalent of the printed page in written literary traditions. This kind of sequence is in principle detectable in the text itself, even divorced from the actual performance (though understandably often not reproduced in full in the written texts that result), but it does also need to be remembered that its contribution is to set up the performance by being uttered at the correct time in the actual time event. Other defining procedures before or during the performance are sometimes not represented in the collected 'text' at all and yet form a significant part in the actual event. The audience is put in the right mood for Mandinka historical narrations for example, and the event defined as a literary one of a certain type, by the special musical introduction (Innes 1976, p. 26), while Fulani-Hausa oral singers' performances at installation ceremonies are introduced by a conventional and expected sequence of actions: first of all appear the apprentices and praise shouters, led by the senior apprentices who perform for 1/2 - 1 1/2 hours before the master singer appears; when he enters he is introduced by the praise shouter, and only then does his performance start (Abdulkadir 1975, p. 148). Musical themes and interludes are often important. In the Fulani heroic narration recorded by Christiane Seydou for example, 'chaque moment de l'épopée se trouve, de la sorte, annoncé, préfiguré par la phrase musicale correspondant à sa dominante affective ou dramatique' (Seydou 1972, p. 49). The same function of setting the scene is performed by the opening glee or curtain raiser in Yoruba opera/drama (Adedeji in Lindfors

1977), in this case with the extra purpose of gathering in the audience. Ricard's analysis of Lomé concert parties and plays describes well the temporal role of the initial music in defining the start of the performance and marking the appropriate time divisions:

Sunset is invariably accompanied by the first twangs of the head guitar. Music is responsible for the temporal division of the performance. In the monotonous progression of the day, the real beginning of the show occurs when the orchestra starts to play. A unique moment beginning at a precise time - day must end before the music begins. From 7 to 9:15 p.m. the musical prologue serves to attract passers-by into the bar and helps warm up both actors and public. The musical prologue resolves one of the essential problems of all theater: how to begin?

(Ricard 1974, p. 166).

The form of actual presentation in time is not always represented in the spatial sequence of the text on a page. By this I mean questions like: whether the piece as represented in the text was actually presented in a single performance, or in bits (perhaps put together by the collector later)?; and, if the latter, whether the different performances were in some sense regarded as serials, to be performed as soon after each other as circumstances permitted, like for instance the Ozidi 7-night performance (Clark 1977) or the Mende narrator's 3-night stand (Cosentino 1980); or performances which could equally well be separated in time? Whether, with short poems especially, the pieces were in fact actually performed as part of a longer sequence of either the same or different items (e.g. short songs which often form part of a story-telling performance but can also be abstracted and published separately)? Did the actual performance in time which was later represented in the single-line format of a written text, in practice include several lead-performers and/or participants (involving yet further elements for investigation about the coordination of their joint performances) or are the words on the page those of just a single narrator/poet? What was the balance for the participants between 'active involvement' and 'vicarious identification' (to follow Abrahams' useful terms, 1976, p. 207)? Was the

narration a 'fluent' and uninterrupted one (the way it always tends to look after publication) or were there on the actual occasion a number of repetitions, asides and interludes? And finally - another aspect which it is not easy to represent on the printed page - how does the performer manipulate time in his actual performance?

Such questions are often not easy to answer. Indeed some authoritative publications give little clue as to these aspects of the texts they include. But questions of this kind inevitably follow from taking seriously the view of oral literature as ultimately dependent on a time event - as, unlike an abiding written text, having 'short time to stay' through being realized in the time event of actual performance. Exploring the possible answers to these questions, furthermore, can throw light on certain important features of African oral literature as well as leading us into some continuing controversies about their nature.

There is not time to do more than touch very lightly on a few of these questions, all of which I suggest would repay further investigation and synthesis.

First, the question of the direct flow or otherwise of the oral presentation in time. Because of the influential model we hold of a text as something which flows on evenly over the page in a linear and single-line mode, it is easy to regard contributions by other than the dominant performer in an oral performance as 'interruptions' to the 'real' literary piece - 'real' being defined (in our terms) as what is abstractable as the linear written text. And yet, there is in fact plenty of evidence that in African story-telling situations a number of people contribute and that this is not necessarily conceived as 'interruption' in our sense. Certain kinds of interpolation are sometimes seen as interruptions, as with the Xhosa or Kamba novice story-tellers (very likely others too) when failure to hold the audience's attention is regarded as a sign of inexperience. But in other cases interpolation is part of the expected presentation rather than an 'interruption' to the main flow. A skillful Limba story-teller expects not only general reaction or exclamations from the audience, but also singles out a particular respondent by name whose role it is to interpolate

exclamations, questions, prompts, and formal replies throughout the actual narration -- something which looks like an 'interruption' in a linear text, but is very much part of the actual performance in time: i.e., of the performance as actually realized and experienced by the intended audience. Again, a narrator may purposely draw in those present to participate in the narration, leading them in as a chorus in the songs he initiates or singling out particular segments of his audience and eliciting their response. Noss gives an example in his stimulating account of Gbaya story-telling:

Narrator: Young men, listen to a tale!
Audience: A tale for laughter, for laughter,
Listen to a tale, a tale for laughter.
N. Young men, listen to a tale!
A. A tale for laughter, for laughter,
Listen to a tale, a tale for laughter.
N. Great men, listen to a tale!
A. A tale for laughter, for laughter,
Listen to a tale, a tale for laughter.

(Noss 1970, p. 42)

Again ritualized taunts - "Don't tell lies" -- play a significant part in the actual presentation of Mende stories. Cosentino explains how the story-teller's response to such expected taunts can lead to a long secondary narration which in one case took up most of one whole night, followed by yet another response to a further taunt before the full narration was concluded (Cosentino 1980, pp. 55,75).

This kind of interchange -- 'interruption' only in terms of a textually-based definition -- does not just occur with stories. Qlajubu describes problems during the actual time event (as distinct from the abstracted ideal type) for the Yoruba Iwi artist at Egungun festivals, problems which must be tackled within the framework of the chant: 'He devises ready poetic expressions with which he answers questions, checks noise makers and wards off other interruptions without having to stop his chant' (Qlajubu 1974, p. 39). This kind of interpolation is a common feature of Yoruba ijala hunters' chants too (and doubtless many other oral forms). Babalola gives an example showing how the chanter makes reply

to a challenge about his veracity which is itself uttered in ijala-chanting form, i.e. forms part of the ijala performance:

Ojú irú eni wònyí nàà ní.

O'ṣ ojú èmi pàá kete àgbà ní ng ọ yà dà.

Mo kúrò l' ọmọde àg békòrùnroko.

(It all happened in the presence of people of my age.

I was an eyewitness of the incident;

Although I was not an elder then,

I was past the age of childhood).

(Babalola 1966, p. 61)

In other genres, the convention is that there should not be such interpolations by members of the audience during the actual presentation, and this understanding again forms part of the definition of the particular nature of the event. These interjections are expected and appreciated in the Mandinka narrations regarded as 'fictional', but not in the performances of the more seriously-regarded narratives about Sunjata -- apart, that is, from the presentation of money during the narration: 'friends and relatives of the griot's host are expected to step forward with their contributions, and they give these to the griot without any interruption of his performance' (Innes 1974, p. 10).

Features of this kind form part of the distinctive internal structuring of the literary genre, as do the occurrence or otherwise of musical prologues or interludes, or the repetition or sharing of particular segments of the recitation by several performers. Yet it is only too easy to simply edit such features out of the text as 'interruptions' of the real underlying flow, or 'redundant' in terms of what is needed to convey it to the reader. By relying on our spatial model of the text, however, and not inquiring further into such features, it may be that we are cutting ourselves off from a better understanding of an oral literary genre as it is actually performed in time - and that, may I repeat again, is the manner in which oral literature is realized and has its existence.

A second complex of problems focuses around the question of how far the texts we have represent single performances in

time, or how far they are composites whose unity may be in part brought about by the collector and the process of collecting itself.

This is a pertinent question for a number of studies of African 'myths'. Are these always based on actual narrations at a particular time? Or is it sometimes the case that these 'myths' are in fact potential rather than actual sequences, in the sense of representing generally-held beliefs but not necessarily being actually performed in a verbalized or narrative form? This pattern is a perfectly recognizable and valid alternative - but it is different from the practice of actual verbalized narration. Books referring to myths can be misleading in this respect, when they refer confidently to 'myths' as if they necessarily take the form of explicit narration as an event in time. This seems in fact to be an easy assumption to step into without questioning perhaps largely as a result of our Western intellectualizing habits, with the consequent inclination to subsume other people's beliefs under the general model of classical literature or of our own 'scriptures'. Hard questions about the time factor (when are these myths actually narrated?) would do much to clarify the differing forms which people's beliefs can take -- sometimes, certainly, expressed in sustained narrative form, but sometimes not.

This may also be a question to ask about publications of poems and narratives which give the impression, through being presented as a single linear text, that they are from one event in time (i.e. one performance) - an impression that may or may not in fact be correct. Some collectors are open about this, in which case the standing of the text is at least clear to the enquiring reader. Thus Driberg's presentation of Lango and Didinga poems is sometimes, he explains, based on direct translation, while other poems 'are synthetic, composed of snatches heard on different occasions, each accurate in itself and homogeneous in content, but not originally one song. I am responsible for combining the different fragments in an appropriate unity' (Driberg 1932, p. 1). Again, Boelaert's publication (1949) of *Lianja* - 'e épopée nationale des Nkundo' is explicitly a synthesis of a number of different versions, one which, he claims, is nonetheless 'unthentiquement indigène' (1949, p. 1). The model behind

these and similar statements is often that of a written text. Just as short extracts or separate chapters can be quoted from an existing written text in the full confidence that the essential whole work remains behind this in some unchanging written form, so with oral literature it is easy to assume that short episodes which could in principle be combined together coherently must 'really' be fragments of some continually existing whole which lies behind these. The result, I suggest, is a misleading picture of the underlying text as somehow really 'there' in some abstract and enduring sense irrespective of its actual realization as an event in time.

This leads into the question of 'epic in Africa', for some years a matter of controversy with some asserting, some denying its prevalence as a traditional genre among African oral forms (see e.g. Finnegan 1970, pp. 108-110, Biebuyck 1972 and 1978a, Okpewho 1977, 1979, Johnson 1980, Opland 1980b). Part of the debate hinges on this same matter of presentation in time: for if one of the conditions of 'epic' is that it should be a 'long' narrative poem, the synthetic nature or otherwise of the presented texts is of direct relevance.

In practice, the background of performance, even the crucial question of whether the 'narrative' was actually (or indeed characteristically) performed as basically one event in time, is not always clear in the published editions of 'epics' (though with the increasing use of tape recorders for the collection of texts, the provision of this kind of information is becoming much more usual). Certainly it does now seem that one form of performance in a number of West African cultures characteristically produces lengthy narratives -- lengthy that is, in the sense of performances lasting two, three or four hours, which, when transcribed can be presented as running to several thousand lines of texts. Some examples are the Mande (or Mandekan) historical narrations of around 1000 - 3000 lines, occasionally as many as 4000 lines (Dumestre 1974, p. 20), taking 2-4 hours to perform (Innes 1974, 1976, 1978, Dumestre 1974, p. 20, Johnson 1978, 1980, Kesteloot and Dumestre 1975; see especially the useful discussion and references in Johnson 1978, Vol. 1 pp. 219-220), the Bulu mvèt 'épopée camerounaise' of about 1600 (Belinga

1978) or, in another case, 5000 lines (Belinga 1977, p. 11), or the Fulani 'recit epique' Silamaka et Poullori which runs to about 50 pages of text (Seydou 1972). Even in these cases some unclarities sometimes remain about whether these were normally delivered in one session and some of the collections divide up the text into a number of 'songs' or 'chants' (e.g. Belinga 1978 - 55 'chants'; Pepper & Wolf 1972 - 12 'chants'). Some published texts may rely on a composite version, as Christiane Seydou for one makes clear in her lucid and straightforwardly argued explanation (1972 pp. 62ff) in which the differing versions are clearly distinguished. One might also still want to ask further about the impact of the role of both the radio and the academic collectors in facilitating such recordings. Nonetheless, for West Africa the existence of such lengthy performances as actual events in time is by now well-attested.

The Congolese cases, however, raise some further problems when subjected to questions about actual presentation as performances in time. The problematic Lianja example from the Nkundo has already been mentioned. A similar problem raises itself with regard to the famous 'Mwindo' epic of the Banyanga. On the lines of the textual evidence, there is obviously a strong case for accepting this as an established epic, representative of a strong epic tradition among the Banyanga. The main text, extending to about 100 pages in translation, has been published (Biebuyck and Mateene 1969), followed by a further volume of several epic texts of 40-50 pages each (Biebuyck 1978b). But how far do such texts really represent an actually realized and performed 'epic tradition' among the Banyanga? It may come as a surprise to learn there is in fact little evidence of this beyond the recorded texts. Biebuyck speaks of his work on Nyanga culture in which, until he found the narrator of the published Mwindo text Mr. Rureke, he had never before heard the epic narrated in full. Nor had Mr. Rureke ever before recited it as a whole - and this despite the fact that, according to Biebuyck, he was the only great performer in Nyanga country at that period (Biebuyck and Mateene 1969, p. 17). In Biebuyck and Mateene's account 'the narrator would never recite the entire story in immediate sequence, but would intermittently perform various select passages of it. Mr. Rureke, whose epic is presented here, repeatedly asserted

that never before had he performed the whole story within a continuous span of days ' (Biebuyck and Mateene 1969, p. 14). He was persuaded to give a performance for collection; but even then, this had to be spun out over 12 days, during which time Mr. Rureke - although the greatest contemporary performer' - became extremely tired and hoarse and had to be treated 'regularly with some European ointments and mouthwashes' (p. vi). This was the first time, writes Biebuyck, that he had ever succeeded in getting a 'complete and coherent text' (p. vi), for though he had been looking for one, up to then he had been unsuccessful because every potential narrator was 'too old and too confused or because he did not remember the complete text', or was 'simply uncooperative' (p. vi). Biebuyck in fact did manage to collect several other texts later too; some of these 'fragmentary' only and all shorter than Mr. Rureke's. At least one came from an assistant who had worked closely with Biebuyck and so presumably knew well what was wanted; texts were also apparently sometimes produced in written form (1978b, pp. 10-12). If one makes Biebuyck's assumption that behind the surface manifestations in performance lies an unchanging epic whole in textual form (possibly in this case with 'Ur-Pygmy' connections) then it might seem reasonable to suggest, as Biebuyck repeatedly does, that narrations of shorter tales sometimes 'really' represent 'fragments of epics' (Biebuyck 1972, p. 258 cf. also 1978a, p. 337) and conclude that the 'promise of an even bigger harvest {of epic texts} is overwhelming' (Biebuyck 1978b, p. ix). If however one looks instead at performance in time as being the usual condition of existence in the case of oral literary forms, then the case looks different. One might question in what sense an epic can really be claimed to 'exist' as a single work when it can be said, as of the 'Mwindo epic', that 'the whole work is seldom performed at a single session. It would take up too much time' (Harries 1970, p. 98) or admitted, as by Biebuyck, that during his 'extensive research in Nyangaland' he met only four bards who had a 'complete grasp of the epic tradition,' those (i.e. including his assistant Sherungu) 'whose epics I have translated' (Biebuyck 1978b, p. 23).

Reflection on this kind of problem has led some scholars to question the evidence for the existence of lengthy epic

narrations in certain African countries. An interesting recent analysis by Jeff Opland (1980b) follows up this question further by suggesting that, far from being a typically oral form (as was once widely believed), epic in the sense of long narrative poetry is in fact dependent on the stimulus and the opportunity provided by writing. Bringing in evidence both from early English parallels and from his own detailed research on Xhosa poetry (where the longest oral poem he recorded was just over 1/2 hour) he argues that it may well be that really long oral poems (say up to several hours' duration) are more likely to develop in association with writing - a development that he traces in some detail among the Xhosa and one for which parallels could well be found in Africa and elsewhere. Certainly the comparative evidence on the effects of feedback from written sources and people's quick and imaginative responsiveness to encounters with written sources and stimuli would make such a possibility well worth exploring (see e.g. Henige 1974, esp. pp. 97ff for the general process, and France 1966 for a neat example from the Pacific). The West African examples seem much more strongly established in the sense of a clear tradition of long narrations realized in actual performance (possibly of a 'cyclic' rather than unitary kind? cf. Johnson 1980, p. 311), though even there a historian might well want to ask how far back the evidence for such regular performances can be traced. However, for elsewhere in Africa (including the Congolese and South African material) Jeff Opland's analysis provides a number of points worth further pondering.

By now, indeed, perhaps the most fruitful approach is to move away from general arguments on the lines of 'does epic (a Western term, after all) exist in Africa?' or 'is this narration really an epic?' and instead follow up more specific questions about how such 'texts' are in fact delivered in performance -- how far as one single performance? in connected and related sessions? or as separate performances over time, seen as having little or no relation to one another? What part, if any, do feedback from written sources or opportunities provided by national radio or by foreign or local scholars play in such performances? These questions can link up with others -- which there is not time to pursue here -- about the frequency of performance

in the sense of the exact (or near exact) repetition of memorized recitations (how far, in other words, do some instances of oral literature become crystallized or fixed, as against the inherent variability expected of others?). And how far is there or is there not evidence of prior composition even rehearsal before the time of the actual performance (a question mentioned briefly earlier in the context of the Lord-Parry theory)?

Questions of this sort seem of little significance within the spatial patterning of a text, but force themselves on our attention once we start taking the time element of African oral literature seriously, and accept the implications of the idea that, in contrast to written literature, the existence of oral forms lies not in a text, but in their realization under what would I sum up as the 'short time to stay' head - that is, as an event in time: in actual performance. Following up such questions in specific research is likely to throw further light on the nature of the oral pieces under consideration as well as on the more general processes of the organization of time in African cultures.

The final question about time and oral performance that I want to mention concerns the internal timing of an oral piece as it is actually performed. I will be brief, both because of my own time constraints and because this topic has been brilliantly treated by other scholars, in particular in the work of Dennis Tedlock.

Orally performed texts as published in spatial form on a printed page give almost no indication of the timing used by the performer. I say 'almost' because our spatial conventions of paragraph indentation, chapter separation and line division can give some hint of what in oral performance may be represented mainly (not necessarily only) by time divisions. Thus the typographical markers by which, in our written tradition, we conventionally define something as 'poetry' by printing it as separated lines, is a device which can be used by the translators of oral texts to convey something of the timing - the pauses above all - inherent in the performance. Beyond this, however, (with a very few exceptions, e.g. Tracey 1967, Seitel 1980, El Shamy 1980) conventional

representations as text normally give absolutely minimal information about the performer's use of time. And yet, as evidenced, among other sources, by my own observation of Limba story-telling, manipulation of tempo can convey drama, characterization, overall structure, and depth of meaning in a narration which as bare verbal text looks bald and unimaginative. By omitting such aspects, we are liable to misjudge the narrative even in literary terms for the very effects which, in written narrative, would be conveyed by a greater elaboration of the words, are in oral narrative represented (in part) through the artistry of timing. As Dennis Tedlock (1980) has suggested, we would be horrified if someone suggested a notation for music which retained the notes themselves but omitted all the information about the time: the length of each note, bar lines, time signature, tempo marks. And yet that is precisely the way texts from oral performances are normally published.

Some experimental notations have been drawn up to try to make it possible to convey such points of timing on the written page, notably by Dennis Tedlock for Zuni narrations (1978) and more recently by Peter Seitel (following Tedlock's model) in his translation of Tanzanian Haya tales. An example will show the sort of text that can result from using conventional typographical devices (indenting, separation and special signs) to represent pauses of various kinds and changes in tempo such as long-drawn-out words (a full explanation is given in Seitel 1980, pp. 36 ff).

Now when she has come to the water...

o

she speaks.

She says, 'Bojo, child-of-my-mother,' she s-a-y-s,

'My sister-

in-law,'

she says, 'Woman-of-people-forbidden-horn,'

She says, 'better to return and let me make amends, woman-of-people-forbidden-horn.'

She says,

'Nine cows and nine maidservants, Woman-of-people-forbidden-horn.'

o

She begins there,

'Listen to my sister-in-law speaking.'
She says, 'Woman-of-people-forbidden-horn.'
She says, 'Eight cows, Woman-of-people-
forbidden-horn.'
She says, 'Nine maidservants, Woman-of-people-
forbidden horn.'
Little tree, shake yourself. Let us from
the spirits now return.
Little tree, shake yourself. Let us from
the spirits now return.

(Seitel 1980, p. 145)

Such experiments draw our attention dramatically to the amount of information omitted in our usual textual representations (information included even in our conventional musical notations, inadequate as many musicologists would consider these as a guide to actual performance). As such, they may help to jolt us out of our complacent acceptance of linear texts as the 'normal' way to represent verbal art and (preferably in conjunction with auditory recordings) focus attention on structural qualities that do not emerge on a written page.

This aspect can be significant too for questions of genre differentiation and the broad distinction often drawn between 'prose' and 'poetry.' For prosodic features like rhythm and metre are closely related to (if not wholly dependent on) the inner timing in particular pieces. Analysis of a linear text alone, above all when certain apparent 'redundancies' or 'unnecessary' repetitions etc. have, as only too often, been edited out, can often not yield the information about timing that is necessary for a full understanding of inner structure. Taking such questions of timing seriously has indeed led to a new approach to the assessment of a number of oral pieces, especially following up the suggestion of Tedlock and others that narrations which in textual terms have been printed as prose, may really be in verse in practice, i.e. as actually delivered (e.g. Tedlock 1972 and 1978 on Zuni, Bright 1979 on Karok). Controversies remain about how far such reassessment is valid on a wide scale, but it is understandable that this suggestion, among other features, has led to a major rethinking about the nature of the published American Indian narratives. 'All the collections that are now in print must be re-done', writes Dell Hymes, 'They do not

show the structure of the texts they present....Hidden within the margin-to-margin printed lines are poems, waiting to be seen for the first time' (Hymes 1979, p. 35).

Similar questions demand to be followed up in African oral literature. Can some of the published 'prose' narratives be reanalyzed as 'verse' once we take the inner timing in actual performance into account? This is a question whose answer may (together with other recent work) throw further light on the controversies over African epic, for one of the points at issue is whether certain claimed 'epics' are in prose or in verse (see e.g. Okpewho 1977). Or will a close study of the inner timing in certain oral performances lead rather to a greater awareness of 'rhythmic prose' in African tales? Or should we question whether in the case of oral literature the definition between prose and verse is really as solid or relevant as it seems in our typographically-bound culture? Certainly exploration of the different 'speech modes' in Mandinka narrative by Gordon Innes and others suggests that more subtle definitions than the broad prose/verse one may well be needed in the analysis of African oral art and that taking seriously questions of inner timing in performance may (along with certain other performance factors) lead us away from the assumption - perhaps an understandable one given the publishing conventions of western culture - that prose is the 'natural' form of expression with other forms to be seen as special deviations from this. Hans Wolff made a similar point effectively in his study of Yoruba ràrà chants when - at a period before the term had gained its present fashionable ring - he pointed to the three main 'discourse' varieties in Yoruba, insisting, in opposition to the normal supposition that conversational prose was the 'basic' one to study, that all three equally demanded linguistic description (Wolff 1962; for a further useful critique of the 'deviationist perspective' on poetic language see Bauman 1977, p. 17).

Questions about timing thus help us to focus on certain features of oral pieces which are both of great significance for a full understanding of their qualities as forms of literary expression and are also likely to throw light on a number of continuing controversies in the general study of oral literature.

Perhaps most important of all, this should help us to

problematise a model that goes so deep in our own culture that it is indeed hard to recognize, much more to query - the idea that the natural and 'normal' representation of literary expression is in spatial terms, through a linear text. To offset the sometimes misleading connotations of this model, it is helpful to offer a model of (oral) literature in which its realization is understood as being in time, its performance as a time event and its inner timing as one central facet of its artistic development. Such a model avoids the common association between 'literature' and the idea of a permanent text which somehow exists 'out of time' and substitutes a focus on the potentialities and subtleties of the temporal ordering of actual performance. McLuhan's generalizations on 'oral' as against 'visual' man are surely too sweeping. But this challenge helps to draw one's attention to the spatial connotation of our view of literature which could well be complemented by a fuller appreciation of the significance of temporal elements in African (and other) oral literatures. Perhaps it is no coincidence that one of the greatest recognized contributions of African culture to that of the West has been precisely in the sphere of timing - in the rhythms of Afro-American music.

In one way, I would like to end up with a strong conclusion about the distinctive characteristics of African oral literature in its peculiar and rich sensitivity to timing, in contrast to our own literate and spatial perceptions. But as I conclude I want to take one more step - that is to turn the argument around, and apply it back on ourselves (that is, on Western cultural forms). I suggest that we have in fact much to learn from African forms that can be applied not just to African oral literature, but to our own written forms as well. For it may well be that we have taken the spatial model of literature too seriously even in analyzing our own literature. Our literature too has oral (and thus temporal) aspects which, though often overlooked, are of far from negligible importance. More of our own literary forms in practice have oral overtones than we usually care to confess - think of reading poetry (do we not often 'hear' it even when reading silently with the eye?) of drama, of reading aloud, of the ubiquitous lyrics (oral poetry) of

popular music? All these are processes in which, as with oral performance, internal timing plays its part in defining the artistic structure.

There is also the question of how our literary forms are actually conceived in time, as time events. Without our earlier consideration of a similar question about African oral literature, this question might seem a nonsensical one, for surely literature exists just through having been written down: it is surely there, permanently, in the text? But there is perhaps also a sense, even with written literature, in which its full existence is not realized just through volumes being on the library shelves or in brochures, but through being actually read - being realized through an event in time. Very similar questions can be asked, in fact, to those concerning oral forms. For example, remembering the questions about the form of presentation of African narrative (single or separated, composite or united) one could pursue parallel inquiries about whether people in practice read books in bits or at a sitting? consume them (whether by their own choice or through publishing conventions) in a serial form or all at one time? read a book in sequence following the numerical order of the pages, or skip around or even start at the back (a common, if disapproved, practice with detective stories, I suspect)? Once we start asking, questions about consumption of literature in time become very obvious ones. Even with written literature the 'short time to stay' paradigm may not, after all, be totally irrelevant.

Surprisingly enough we know very little about this aspect. There is a great deal of research in the sociology of literature on such topics as the processes of publication and production, authors' position, numbers of books sold and borrowed, and so on; some very pertinent questions have also been raised by the French sociologist of literature, Robert Escarpit on 'creative treason' in reading (1971) and, perhaps even more relevantly, by Derrida's recent work on the different readings even of a written work (e.g. 1977). But on the details of just when books are actually read (in a sense, how the literature is actually realized, in its way 'performed') - almost nothing. A little emerges through some of the time budget studies (e.g. Szalai 1972, p. 104ff, 283ff) and Escarpit at the end of his Sociology of literature includes a few interesting hints on 'the circumstances of reading' (1971 pp. 93-5), including

on the practice of reading at night. But beyond this, such questions seem to have been little followed up in detailed research. The whole subject is a fascinating one once we bring ourselves to go outside the spatial model by which literature is defined in terms of a permanent text and could lead us to a much greater understanding of our own assumptions and practices. Learning something of African dimensions of time can perhaps teach us more about ourselves.

The same point applies, I would suggest, to the general question of the overall organization of time. It will be clear by now that I would question the large contrasts which I mentioned at the start in which the European measured and 'rational' organization of time is set against the less formalized African usage seen as depending on natural rhythms, social interaction, and recurrent annual cycles. At least as far as the investigation of the organization of African oral literature goes, it emerges that far from taking a passive or communal attitude to time, in practice the time events involved in oral performances entail a wide degree of organization - collective action requiring the coordination of people and their activities, the choice of differing ways to spend time, the ordering of events and roles in specific sequences, and the creation of time divisions in a quite specific way of a kind not really suggested in the general comments on uses of time in Africa. There is still a wide scope for further investigation of more detailed points about specific time budgets and modes of social interaction and coordination with regard to the timing of oral literary events - but the broad picture is clear enough to be able to conclude that the model of African organization of time as linking with the romantic 'back to nature' and non-differentiated view of life is indeed misleading.

But so is the opposite model misleading of our own culture. And here too I want to turn the argument back on ourselves. Is the organization of time in Western cultures really so 'rational' and clock-bound as such broad contrasts suggest? Certainly we like to start activities at the arranged clock-time, but does this really take priority over social interaction and agreement? As Wilbert Moore enquired in his perceptive, but surprisingly little cited, Man, time

and society - does a meeting start 'on time' if the chairman is late (1963, p. 47)? Again we may pride ourselves, following one model, on our rational clock-bound and objective system of time-reckoning, an abstract system transcending the differing areas and groups of our society. But in practice, as Maurice Halbwachs once pointed out, we follow a whole system of different times according to the group we belong to: so there are the differing times of the office, the street, visiting, the home; and in our social life and interaction it is not always the abstract calendar year that comes first in our thoughts, for there are also (depending on our social commitments) the academic year, the religious, the commercial, the secular, the agricultural, and the military years (Halbwachs 1947, p. 6,8). In our culture too, perhaps the crucial thing is, after all, coordinating our activities with those of others so as to take part in those events which we choose to participate in, and by doing so to recognize (and so create) the time divisions that we think are the important ones. Here too, as Paul Fraisse put it, "the harmonization of individual times is the result of a multitude of interactions through which they tend gradually toward the cooperation which is necessitated by social life" (Fraisse 1963, p. 290). Perhaps there is little difference in essence in the dimensions of time organization between African and Western cultures after all. For us too, as for the Nuer, 'time is...relations between activities' (Evans-Pritchard 1939, p. 202).

At any rate, these are the speculations to which the consideration of oral performance in the context of time can lead one. This is not, I would end by remarking, the only way to approach African literature - studying it in terms of literary texts of course remains in certain contexts a valid approach. But adding the time dimension and looking at African oral literature as an event in time rather than just the manifestation of a spatially defined text does, as I have suggested to you, raise many interesting questions for further thought, questions which can both lead to specific research topics (about time budgets for instance) and also open up wider implications for the understanding of our social life and of the nature of literature -- questions of a kind which, I trust, Hans Wolff too would have approved.

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HANS WOLFF MEMORIAL LECTURES
1968 - Present

- 1968-69 David Dalby, University of London. United Kingdom. Linguistics. "Black through White: Patterns of Communication." (24 March 1969)
- 1969-70 Emile Snyder, University of Wisconsin. United States. African Literature. "Tradition and Modernism in African Literature." (4 March 1970)
- 1971-72 Wilfred H. Whiteley. University of London. United Kingdom. Linguistics and Anthropology. "To Plan is to Choose: The Rationale and Consequences of Language Choice in Eastern Africa." (7 April 1972)
- 1972-73 Anthony H.M. Kirk-Greene, St. Antony's College, Oxford University. United Kingdom. French, Political Science, and Anthropology. "Mutumin Kirkii: The Concept of the Good Man in Hausa." (11 April 1973)
- 1973-74 A.E. Meeussen. University of Leiden and Royal Museum of Brussels. Belgium. Linguistics. "Africanisms." (18 April 1974)
- 1974-75 Sembene, Ousmane. Senegal. Novelist and film-maker. "Man is Culture." (5 March 1975)
- 1975-76 A. Teixeira DaMota. Centro de Estudos de Cartografia Antiga, Lisbon. Portugal. History, Geography. "Some Aspects of Portuguese Colonization and Maritime Trade in West Africa in the 15th and 16th Centuries." (5 March 1976)
- 1976-77 Nathan M. Shamuyarira, University of Dar es Salaam. Zimbabwe. Political Science and Journalism. "The Political and Economic Crisis in Southern Africa." (14 April 1977)
- 1977-78 Batourou Sekou Kouyate, National Ensemble of Republic of Mali. Mali. Kora soloist. A concert of Mande poetry and song. (19 April 1978)
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- 1979-80 Leo Kuper, University of California-Los Angeles. South Africa. Sociology. "South Africa: Human Rights and Genocide." (18 April 1980)
Hilda Kuper, University of California-Los Angeles. South Africa. Anthropology. "Biography as Interpretation." (21 April 1980)
- 1980-81 Ruth Finnegan. Open University, Milton Keynes. United

Kingdom. Folklore and Anthropology. "Short Time to Stay: Comments on Time, Literature and Oral Performance." (1 April 1981)

1981-82 Francis M. Deng, Ambassador from Sudan to Canada. Sudan. Law, Jurisprudence, and Anthropology. "Security Problems: an African Predicament." (23 October, 1981)